

# **Single Family Design Guidelines Update/ Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance Update**

## **ISSUE PAPER H**

### **Form-Based Zoning**

The purpose of this issue paper is to:

1. **Update** the Steering Committee and Staff regarding trends in Form-Based Zoning
2. **Discuss** advantages and feasibility of Form-Based Zoning applicable to issues associated with the Single Family Design Guidelines/Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance Update.

### **Background**

The American Planning Association introduces the topic of form-based zoning in a recent publication first by describing conventional zoning as follows:

“In many U.S. cities, zoning codes may hinder the building of neighborhoods and towns that follow proven successful urban patterns... In some cities, conventional zoning codes may result in a brutal, placeless landscape that alienates residents and degrades the built environment.”

Some communities are exploring replacing conventional codes with form-based codes. These codes, rather than prescriptive – or stating how development may NOT occur, are instead proscriptive, and state ranges of desirable forms of development, in other words what IS preferred. As described in the Attachments for this issue paper, form-based codes have been implemented in new communities, such as Seaside, Florida, and have also been used to revitalize and reshape different downtown communities. The codes convey allowable building types with concise graphics and also address allowed uses with performance standards.

The City of Santa Barbara is far from a “brutal, placeless landscape that alienates residents and degrades the built environment”. However, it is important to note that much of the City was built before the current zoning standards were enacted. This paper begins to explore whether zoning standards can be improved by utilizing some aspects of the Form-Based Zoning approach to ensure the livability of the City’s residential neighborhoods. This paper does not explore whole-sale implementation of a form-based coding system as some communities have opted to implement. Rather, this paper explores whether form-based zoning and coding concepts could provide a useful new perspective and tools for addressing some common single-family residential projects in Santa Barbara.

Some common expansion patterns are occurring in many single family neighborhoods as follows:

- Expansion from a one-car garage to a two-car garage near the front of a property
- Remodels to create more open living room/dining room and kitchen floor plans
- Kitchen expansions
- Bedroom enlargements
- New bedrooms and new bathrooms

For neighborhoods that have been developed in a consistent pattern, perhaps as part of the same tract, are there a few preferred solutions to these types of expansions? Can these preferred solutions be defined and incentives provided to applicants when these preferred solutions are implemented? A form-based zoning approach would be different from the current City of Santa Barbara zoning approach. Small steps towards experimental use of Form-Based Zoning or Coding could be implemented for some common single-family residential project types. For example, if a preferred form is followed for expansion project and quality architectural designs are proposed; a project could potentially be reviewed at a staff level rather than by the ABR. Following are some potential applications of this approach.

- **Expansion from a one-car garage to a two-car garage:** Configuration examples for typical lot sizes and building configurations could be provided. The examples would require no modification to complete, result in an appropriate neighbor-friendly “street presence” as viewed from the street, and meet transportation minimum standards.
- **Small second-story additions:** Prototypes of preferred solutions for modest second story additions could be provided in a form-based code. It appears the Steering Committee may be interested in having more second story projects reviewed by the ABR than are currently reviewed. Some of these second story additions which currently only receive building permits might be given the option of following a form-based code. In this scenario, if the project complied with the optional form-based code, the project would then be eligible for Staff administrative review, rather than full ABR Board review.
- **One-Story Additions:** Currently one-story hillside district projects are reviewed by the ABR. Perhaps general prototypes of one-story additions which minimize grading and appear aesthetically appropriate could be made available. Applicants who choose to complete modest one-story additions in hillside districts which follow a general prototype could have their project approved at a staff level.

Potential advantages of modest form-based code applications described above are:

- Form-Based codes are potentially much easier for the public and developers to interpret because they make use of graphics to illustrate what is desired.
- Review of projects can be abbreviated since there is a clearer understanding among applicants and Staff regarding what constitutes an appropriate project “up front”.
- Overall quality and neighborhood compatibility of projects would improve.

- Reduction of ABR case-load. The ABR could better focus on projects more likely to pose issues.

Some potential disadvantages:

- A form-based code may be interpreted as more restrictive, because it would *appear* to be more restrictive. For example, a form-based code would likely not proscribe buildings of 30' tall, whereas the current Zoning Code states a building cannot be taller than 30'. In reality though, the ABR would not approve a 30' tall single family home in most neighborhoods because it would be incompatible with surrounding homes. In other words, a Form-Based Code would give a better indication of what is approvable by proscribing only a reasonable building height, but in so-doing, may appear more restrictive than the current Zoning Code, even though in reality, the Form-Based Code wouldn't really be more restrictive as far as what is *approvable*.
- One-size does not fit all. Some properties may have been remodeled since an original tract was created and properties vary in regard to site constraints. A form-based code or optional form-based abbreviated processing incentives may not easily apply for many properties.

A wholesale rewrite of the City of Santa Barbara's single-family zones to follow a form-based approach is not recommended. However, some aspects of form-based zoning and coding concepts could be implemented in a small way for some single-family projects. Optional form-based codes could be presented as options to follow for common projects such as garages, second story additions and hillside one-story projects as described above. Use of optional form-based codes could create a clearer, simpler, less expensive application process for some applicants, expand staff review of some projects and lighten ABR case load. Implementation of optional form-based codes for some single-family projects might also improve overall project quality and compatibility.

## **Attachments**

These readings are meant to help clarify the concept of form-based zoning and coding. Please note that most examples described in these attachments of form-based coding concept applications are a very large scale for all types of projects and uses, including mixed use. Please focus attachment reading on gaining an overall understanding of form-based coding concepts and functioning.

1. Form First, by Peter Katz, Planning, November 2004.
2. Isla Vista Master Plan Excerpt, County of Santa Barbara, June 2003.
3. Zoning Practice, APA, May 2004.

*Additional APA Form-Based Zoning Training Package reading materials are under review and may be distributed separately.*

## **References**

City of Louisville, Kentucky  
Cornerstone 2020 Comprehensive Plan  
<http://www.loukymetro.org/Department/PlanDesign/cornerstonegraphic.asp>  
City of Palo Alto

County of Santa Barbara  
Isla Vista Master Plan  
[www.islavistaplan.org](http://www.islavistaplan.org)

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